

Why Family Planning and Reproductive Health are Critical to the Well-Being of Youth



An unprecedented number of young people are entering their reproductive years, most of whom live in the developing world. U.S. policymakers should assist in effort to ensure that youth worldwide are able to make informed decisions about their sexuality and receive the family planning and reproductive health care that they require. The U.S. should support these efforts by providing adequate funding for international family planning and reproductive health programs.

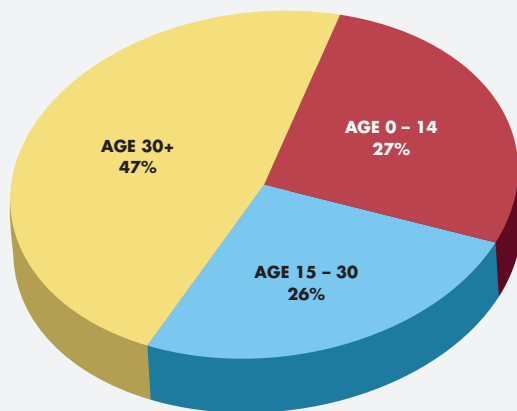
Big Challenges and Big Opportunities: Youth, Family Planning, and Reproductive Health

Now, more than ever, young people are in need of comprehensive family planning and reproductive health services. In 2008, the world's population reached a high of 6.8 billion people—over one-half under the age of 30, and over one quarter under the age of 15 (Chart 1).¹ The largest number of youth entering reproductive age live in the developing world where access to family planning and reproductive health services is very low.

Young people's access to family planning and reproductive health is a fundamental right. The international community recognizes that youth must have access to comprehensive, evidence-based, scientifically accurate, and youth friendly family planning and reproductive information, services, and supplies. The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action endorsed by 179 countries identifies young people's reproductive rights as a priority. Youth were also a key consideration in the 2009 review of the ICPD.

Large, youth populations in developing countries are both a challenge and an opportunity for national development. Countries with large youth populations have historically faced the greatest challenges in

CHART 1. WORLD POPULATION BY AGE





terms of political stability, with six out of every seven outbreaks of civil conflicts between 1970 and 1999 occurring where 60 percent or more of the population was under the age of 30.² Strong investments in education, training, and jobs for youth help countries with large youthful populations take advantage of the demographic window of opportunity presented by a large working-age population and spur economic and social development. By providing youth with information and access to family planning and reproductive health services, countries empower their young people to prevent unplanned pregnancies, protect themselves from HIV and other STIs, and stay in school. It can also help countries transition from high to low fertility and mortality and create a more balanced age structure. Investments in family planning, health, and education leads to a better educated, healthier population and therefore better overall development outcomes for youth worldwide.

DID YOU KNOW?

Contraceptive use among young people is generally very low—particularly in developing countries. Contraceptive prevalence among young women aged 15 -24 ranges from a low of three percent in Rwanda to a high of 66 percent in Colombia.

DID YOU KNOW?

Every year, 1 in 20 adolescents contract a sexually transmitted infection (STI), and the average age at which infections occur is becoming younger.

Checking the Pulse: The Reality of Young People's Lives

Women need not die in child birth. We must give every young woman the information and support she needs to control her reproductive health, help her achieve a safe pregnancy, and care for her and her new born well into childhood.

— Kikelomo, member of the Advocates Youth Association, Abuja, Nigeria, February iYAN Newsletter

Girls between the ages of 15 -19 are twice as likely as older women to die from pregnancy-related causes due to physical, social, and economic factors.³ Up to one-third of girls worldwide report their first sexual experience was forced, with long term emotional and physical consequences.⁴ In sub-Saharan Africa in particular, many girls' early sexual relationships take place with considerably older men in exchange for money, gifts, or other forms of support, which significantly increases girls' chances of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV or becoming pregnant.⁵ Working with youth and adults to address gender inequality and improve economic and educational opportunities for girls is important to reduce the risks that sexual activity poses.

We are excited about the lifting of the Global Gag Rule. We hope that this will translate into more effective programming and funding for family planning, contraceptives and condoms, and for improved access to reproductive health services among women.

— Amos Mwale, Executive Director, Youth Vision Zambia

WANT TO GET INVOLVED? LEARN MORE? CHECK OUT:

PAI's Young People's Working Group:

PAI does a range of work to educate and empower young people domestically and internationally.

Advocates for Youth:

champions efforts to help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health.

Youth Coalition:

an international organization of young people committed to promoting adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive rights at the national, regional and international levels.

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS):

advocates for the right of all people to accurate information, comprehensive education about sexuality, and sexual health services.

Pathfinder International:

one of the first international reproductive health organizations to support projects for adolescents and who has since worked with young people in more than 30 countries on a wide range of health issues.

Comprehensive education can ensure that young people have the information and skills to make informed decisions about family planning and reproductive health.

Evidence-based education empowers young people to adopt safer behaviors and helps to lower the incidence of unplanned pregnancies and reduce the spread of HIV and other STIs. Well-designed and executed education programs leads youth to delay, rather than hasten, sexual initiation and adolescent pregnancy rates and child marriage rates decline as education increases.⁶

Policy Recommendations

The U.S. should invest \$1 billion annually to promote reproductive health and family planning and safeguard the family planning and reproductive health and rights of people of all ages. Donor countries - especially the U.S. - must increase funding for family planning and reproductive health programs internationally, particularly those that address the unique needs of youth. While an estimated 218 million women lack access to effective contraception and the largest generation of young people in global history is entering reproductive age, total donor funding for family planning has declined

DID YOU KNOW?

Over 14 million adolescent girls between the ages of 15 -19 give birth each year—more than 90 percent of these young mothers live in the developing world, especially Africa.

to an all time low in 2006.⁷ From 1995 to 2009, U.S. government investments in international family planning declined by 35 percent, when adjusted for inflation.⁸

The U.S government should reclaim its role as a global leader in working to prioritize the healthy development of young people worldwide, including youth access to family planning and reproductive health services and information. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has a long history of implementing and supporting family planning and reproductive health programs and, with greater investments from Congress and better coordination with other U.S. international health and development programs, could scale up these programs to reach new audiences worldwide, including more youth.



The U.S. government should work in close collaboration with other stake holders, including youth, other donors, and developing countries, to develop and strengthen funding levels and policies that ensure that all youth can access information and make informed decisions about family planning and reproductive health. Widely available, affordable youth-friendly family planning and reproductive health services enrich young people's lives, and have wider social benefits through improved health, security, and economic growth.

DID YOU KNOW?

Among youth age 15-19 in Ghana, only 28 percent of women and 21 percent of men were able to identify common myths about pregnancy and knew at least one modern method of contraception. Only about one-third of the same group could both correctly identify ways of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV and reject major misconceptions about HIV.

Endnotes

- 1 Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. 2008. *World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision*. New York: United Nations. <http://esa.un.org/unpp>. Accessed 18 June 2009.
- 2 Leahy, E with R Engelman, C Gibb Vogel, S Haddock and T Preston. 2007. *The Shape of Things to Come - Why Age Structure Matters To A Safer, More Equitable World*. Washington, DC: Population Action International.
- 3 WHO. 2006. *Pregnant Adolescents: Delivering on Global Promises of Hope*. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO.
- 4 Jewkes, R, C Garcia-Moreno and P Sen. 2002. "Chapter 6: Sexual Violence." In E Krug, L Dahlberg, J Mercy, A Zwi and R Lozano. *World Report on Violence and Health*. Geneva, World Health Organization. http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/; Accessed 5 June 2009.
- 5 Hope, R. 2007. *Addressing Cross-Generational Sex: A Desk Review of Research and Programs*. Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau.
- 6 Wellings, K, M Collumbien, E Slaymaker, S Singh, Z Hodges, D Patel and N Bajos. 2006. "Sexual Behaviour in Context: A Global Perspective." *The Lancet* 368 (9548): 1706-1728; Khan, S and V Mishra. 2008. "Youth Reproductive and Sexual Health." *DHS Comparative Reports No. 19*. Calverton, Maryland: Macro International Inc.
- 7 Guttmacher adding it up 2009 update-insert citation when published; UNFPA/NIDI. 2008. "Table 5a. Final Donor Expenditures for Population Assistance, by Category of Population Activity, 1996 - 2006." *Financial Resource Flows for Population Activities in 2006*. New York: UNFPA.
- 8 Population Action International. 2008. "Trends in U.S. Population Assistance." http://www.populationaction.org/Issues/U.S._Policies_and_Funding/Trends_in_U.S._Population_Assistance.shtml. Accessed 25 June 2009.